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Klaus Barbie: Spy for the U.S.

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Certain symmetries of history can be disconcerting.

One might expect an ex-Gestapo officer like Klaus Barbie to plead that "being part of a military organization I had to work within channels; during those turbulent times I had no access to the press, and it was impossible to skip channels and go to higher headquarters directly."

But one would not expect that sort of pleading from a former American intelligence officer like

where, became acquainted in the late spring of 1948. Dabringhaus was a civilian officer in the U.S. Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) in Germany. For over half a year he was put in charge of a network of ex-SS officers that Barbie helped organize and direct.

Dabringhaus argues that Barbie not only avoided payment for his war crimes, but thrived within the American intelligence apparatus because the United States dumped its experienced intelligence professionals along with the rest of its military force as soon as the war ended. This left the postwar intelligence work in the hands of novices. By contrast, Barbie was a ruthless and experienced intelligence operator. When he was brought into the American intelligence network by a fellow German in 1947, he quickly became more expert about the workings of CIC than the Americans who were handling him.

Postwar U.S. counterintelligence in Germany was originally focused on eradicating any resurgence of Nazism, but changed to anticommunism as a result of rising East-West tensions. Barbie was brought into the U.S. intelligence net as this shift was occurring, reducing attention to his criminal past.

In trying to explain the use of such a notorious Gestapo fugitive, Dabringhaus never seems to capture adequately the spirit of the time. But that, regrettably, is not the only weakness of this book. It fails to resolve a number of inconsistencies between Dabringhaus' work and that of others. For example, in his 1983 letter to NBC, Dabringhaus flatly claimed he "was authorized to pay \$1,700 per month in American dollars" to Barbie and his colleagues. Two authors of much more detailed studies of Barbie, Brendan Murphy and Tom Bower, claim there is no evidence to support this statement. Bower says Dabringhaus' "original claim that the envelopes contained \$1,700 per month has . . . been

revised down to \$500 per month. Every other CIC officer has derided this account, insisting that they never used real American dollars." Nor does Dabringhaus clarify conclusively the who, when and where of U.S. concern with Barbie's ghastly past. To his credit, Dabringhaus expressed his own misgivings in 1948, but only through "channels."

The Dabringhaus book tells us little that he and others haven't said elsewhere. The book is also padded with reproductions of odd documents, many of which lack dates or sources. The text includes long quotations from Barbie and others without a single footnote or source reference. There is, moreover, an inexcusable amount of repetition. In short, this is a badly edited book, which is the fault of a publisher that knows how to do better.

Part of the author's urge to publish seems to spring from his quarrels with the Justice Department's Ryan Report on Barbie's U.S. employment, issued in August 1983 as a result of Dabringhaus' media alert. But in comparison to Dabringhaus' book, the government report is a model of well-documented, orderly argumentation.

In response to his reports to headquarters on Barbie's sadistic past, Dabringhaus says he was assured "that Barbie would be turned over to the French when his value as an informant was exhausted." Instead, Barbie's pay was increased and Dabringhaus was promoted and reassigned at his own request.

Did Dabringhaus really expect higher authorities to turn in an agent whose utility was growing as the result of rising East-West hostilities, whose use was central to the competition among intelligence services and, ultimately, whose exposure would have compromised and embarrassed his U.S. employers?

If so, the author was an innocent in a business in which innocence is rewarded only by writers of fiction.

Book World

KLAUS BARBIE:

The Shocking Story of How the U.S. Used This

Nazi War Criminal as an Intelligence Agent

By Erhard Dabringhaus.

(Acropolis. 208 pp. \$13.95)

Erhard Dabringhaus. Yet it is not Barbie but Dabringhaus who makes this disclaimer in "Klaus Barbie: The Shocking Story of How the U.S. Used This Nazi War Criminal as an Intelligence Agent."

Klaus Barbie is, of course, a former Gestapo officer known as the "Butcher of Lyon." He was spirited from Bolivia to France in February 1983 and is awaiting trial in Lyon on charges of crimes against humanity. Dabringhaus, a Wayne State University professor emeritus of German language and cultural history, happened to see a Jan. 20, 1983, NBC "Nightly News" report on Barbie in Bolivia. It shocked him into writing to NBC in New York and revealing that Barbie had been a postwar spy for the United States in Germany.

Barbie and Dabringhaus, as detailed in this book and else-